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## **AFSHARI CARPET “SONGUR” (SONGOR)**

**Abstract.** In the paper the origin of the unique and well-known design of the carpet of Afsar «Songur», design features and semantics of decorative motifs performs as the subject of research. At present in private collections, mass media, and in the descriptive texts on carpet drawn up by foreign companies on the sale of goods «Songur» is presented as a Kurdish carpet art. However, it is disturbing to present various sources of carpets, such as «Kolyayi», «Sirjan», «Hamadan», «Zanjan», «Sarab», «Kalardasht» and even «Khotan». Pointing to this issue in the article, it is proved that the territory of carpet is Turkish-Afshar origin.

**Key words:** Afshar, Songur, Turkish carpet, nomadic, tribal carpet.

**Introduction.** The unique and recognizable design of the carpet «Songur» is indicated in world collections, dealer sites and Internet resources under the names indicating its various geographical origins. These conflicting names for the same design create confusion when classifying this carpet. The appearance on the market of numerous replicas further complicates the situation. Obviously, there is a need to understand the authenticity of the cultural and historical environment in which it appeared. Considering that the carpet was created by nomads and contains an original design, a stable ornamental potential and symbolism of tribal traditions, the ethno-cultural “soil” of its origin should be clarified.

**The interpretation of the main material.** The first question that needs to be answered is: Who are the creators of this carpet? And only after the answer to it do the geography of the origin of the carpet.

The same design of the carpet is designated under different names: “Koli-ai”, “Songor”, “Sirjan”, “Hamadan”, “Zanjan”, “Nakhavand”, “Sarab”. This design can be found even under the name «Khotan». This confusion reflects more than carpet replicas. Among them are authentic carpets.

The traditional design of any tribal carpet is a local cultural phenomenon and its authenticity is associated with the specific ethno-cultural environment and traditions that gave rise to it. Wherein. The evolution of design is important.

Analysis of 74 published for free access copies of this carpet in collections and dealer descriptions, revealed that the most numerous names are “Koliai” and Sirjan”. Next, to decrease, follow: «Songor», «Hamadan», Zanzan «,» Sarab «,» Nahavand «,» Kalardasht «,» Khotan «.

Let's start with the most popular name, “Kolyai” (Koliai). Koliai is a rural district center of Songor County. The district and the city of the same name Songur is located in the Iranian province of Kermanshah. The main population of the district and its villages Kurdish, Azerbaijani and Lurs [1; 2]. The name «Songur» comes from the Turkic word «sungur» (osprey) - from the family of eagle birds. The bird Osprey was an ancient ongon of the Turkic tribes who founded this fortified settlement as SafavidKyzylbashs. The majority of the inhabitants of Songur speak the South Oguz dialect of the Azerbaijani language, which linguists consider to be the Aynalu dialect [3, 43-55]. The Aynalu clan is a substrate of the Afshar and Shahseven tribes.

From the middle of the 17th century, a new, civil settlement began to form not far from Songur, the original name of which was Kulliye. The name Kulliye comes from the Arabic word and meant a collective place, where the palace, the mosque, the madrasa, the bazaar, the hamam, the caravanserai and other buildings were located in a heap. The old name - Kulliye gradually distorted by the new Kurdish settlers, took the form - Koliai.

Thus, Koliai is the name of the district center, which is part of the Songor district. Along with Koliai, in the vicinity of Songor there are two more villages (Qal'a-ye FarhādKhan - 2 km north of Sonqor; and Qorva - 5 km southwest of Sonqor). The spoken language of these villages is slightly different from the Songuri dialect (azerbaijani) [3, 54].

Along with Koliai, carpets were also made in these villages. But for some reason “Koliai” was chosen as a trade name. In the name of this carpet it would be more correct to use the common name of the district - “Songur carpet”.

The autochthonous population of the city of Songur associates its origin with the Shah's Guards of the Safavids, the Kyzylbashs of the Oguz tribe [4]. But the ethnic history of this district begins much earlier, from the epoch when this whole territory was part of the Ak-Koyunlu Turkoman ethno-po-

litical confederation [5]. The Turkomans positioned themselves as a union of the Oguz tribes.

The population and its environs initially consisted of two tribal associations - Afshari and Bayandur. Over time, the Shahsevens, also belonging to the South Oguz group, joined this confederation [6]. The Afshars, Bayandurs and Shahsevens, in turn, were divided into clans, each of which lived in an independent oymak (oymaq) (homeland). The population of these oymak consisted of nomads - herders. The routes of their nomads extended to the north, up to the mountain pastures of Mount Savalan.

Mount Savalan is located in close proximity to the Caucasus Azerbaijan. Along the bed of one of the tributaries of the Araks River, starting from the mountain range, nomads and cattle freely moved to Caucasian Azerbaijan (across the Araks River in the village Khudaferin) to the Dzhabrail steppe and Mugan (Caucasian Azerbaijan). Nomads perceived the ranges of Caucasian Azerbaijan and Persia - as equivalent to their homeland. For this reason, this group of nomads calls itself- "MoganShahseven" (Shahseven of Moqan) [7]. In the carpet attributions can be found the term «Mogan / SavalanShahseven». At this time, the habitat and pastures of these nomadic tribes were not yet divided between the Russian Empire and Iran.

Today, Afshars, Shahsevens, Qashqai, Qajars, Bayanduri, Baharlu, Aynalu and many other Oguz ethnic groups on both sides of the Araks River are the main subethnos that formed the modern Azerbaijani nation of the Caucasus Azerbaijan.

The ethnic Kurds, nomads of Songur district and southeastern Kurdistan, also experienced the cultural influence of the Oguz tribes. After the Gulistan Peace Agreement of 1813 between Persia and Russia, many Kurds of this region were resettled in Caucasian Azerbaijan (Muslim Kurds voluntarily and Kurds Yezidis forced.) The Kurds of the Songur district had close contacts with the Afshars and the Shahsevens.

Speaking of the influence of Caucasian carpets on Kurdish carpets, President and Founder of Claremont Rug Company in Oakland, CA Jan David Wihnitz speaks : "To a remarkable extent, Kurdish rug-makers have always readily adapted the antique carpet patterns of the neighboring weaving traditions into their own carpets. This is clearly seen in the nomadic and village pieces of the Kurds of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus. The Kurds of Iranian "the Northwest," as they are called, adopted the prevalent Caucasian carpet

designs of Kazak and Karabagh such as the diagonally striped field, and the crenellated fence and stylized dragon borders...” [8]. In the future, we will witness that Shirvan carpets also had a tangible impact on Kurdish carpets.

Another expert on oriental carpets - William Eagleton there is also no doubt about the influence of Caucasian carpets on Kurds: “The overall effect is reminiscent of some of the crude, but much appreciated, Caucasian rugs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries” [9].

Along with the nomadic migration of carpet traditions and designs, the role of the Silk Road trade missions should be noted. Caucasian carpets “moved” not only along the western route to Istanbul, and from there to Europe. They were exported along the southern route: from the Caucasus Shemakha and Beylagans - along the route: Ardabil-Rasht-Qazvin-Hamadan-Baghdad [10].

Numerous Caucasian pilgrims who made Haj to Mecca moved along the caravan routes of the Silk Road. They also moved the carpets of Caucasian Azerbaijan to Hamadan in their carts, and from there to Baghdad and Mecca.

As a result of the exchange and trade between the related tribes Afshar, Shahseven and Qashqai, Kipchak and others, the motifs of “Songur Carpet” appear in the carpets of these tribes. The migration of the “Songur Carpet” design to the south of Iran, to the Kerman region, is connected with the forced relocation of a part of the nomad Afshar from the Songur region to Sirjan. There, the design «Songur» acquired a new name - «Sirjan Carpet».

Other names of the carpet «Songur», such as: «Hamadan», «Zanjan», «Nakhavand», «Sarab», which are available in dealer attributions, are associated with routes and points of delivery of carpets to the market. The presence of the largest carpet market in the region in Hamadan also had an impact. The carpet delivered by the dealer from Hamadan is the acquired name “Hamadan carpet”.

As for the prefix to the name “Koliai” of the carpet - “kurdish” and “kur-di”, it is rather a speculation or a marketing ploy. Koliai is indeed the Kurdish settlement of Songur County and also has old carpet traditions. The design of the carpet «Songur», its ornamental potential, and the semantics of the motifs exclude the Kurdish origin of this design. The opinion of Jan David Wihnitz, William Eagleton, and other experts on the impact of Turkic (Azerbaijani) carpets on Kurdish was mentioned above.

Consider the main motifs of the carpet «Songur»:

1. A three-part “ketebe” of the central field with a red background, forming a central gel (rosette) is present in the Anatolian and Shirvan carpets.

Identical iconography of symmetrically repetitive aftoba (a jug of water for ritual ablution *Namaz*) is characteristic of Afshar and Shirvan carpets. The background color of the gel (central outlet) is necessarily red.

2. Some ornamental motifs of the carpet contain in their «genetic memory» tamga and runic signs. Their presence is characteristic of Turkic and not Kurdish carpets. Having turned into an ornament, Tamgas were included in the tribal or clan symbolism of carpets.

The most characteristic motif of the central rosette of the “Songur” carpet is a horizontal strip (usually of black color), formed from two parallel lines with bent ends. This basic typological motif forms a common design basis with mirror-like bottom and top of the central field of the carpet. Such a dividing horizontal strip is typical for Turkmen carpets “TekkeEnsi” and “YomutEnsi”). If in Turkmen carpets this band plays the role of a dividing border, here it is turned into an independent motif of the central rosette.

The horizontal strip in the design of the “Songur” carpet separates (unites) the schematic and decorative motif of the Muslim talisman “Hamail” (Muska). In reality, this talisman containing a prayer written in Arabic graphics was hung around the neck of a Muslim. Fringe or thin chains hanging from the talisman make this motif recognizable.

The triangular (arrow-shaped) mascot form imitates the mikhrab arch (niche) of the mosque, to which the worshiper addresses during prayer.

The symbolic combination of the ancient talisman and mihrab of the mosque can be clearly seen on the prayer rugs of Anatolia. The presence of the same motive in the “Songur” carpet indicates a close connection with Anatolian carpets.

3. The mother bordure of the Songur carpet also contains a tamgas motif transformed into a stylized dragon. The Tamga of the Bayandur tribe, which is in alliance with the Afshars and Shahsevens, is S-shaped and perfectly suited for creating a sketchy dragon. The Bayandur tribe entered into a confederation with the Afshar tribe. Tamga in the form of a dragon was also in the state symbolism of the Apsharids.

It is well known that the tribal and clan tamgas of nomadic Türks were considered to be protective signs and depicted as amulets. Such a protective function and has a symbolic image of a dragon. In the Kurdish mythology, on the contrary, the dragon (Ajdakha) has negative symbolism and is a carrier of evil. The symbolism of the Kurdish dragon goes back to the ancient Elam

and Zoroastrian motifs of the evil dragon «Ajidakha.» A negative evaluation of the image of the dragon is found in Kurdish myths, folklore and literature. In Kurdish Yezidi mythology, the dragon “Zia” is the eternal enemy of the people. In the myths and tales of the Kurds there is a young hero who fights with the dragon and there is an image of the god-killer of dragons - Vahagan (11. 199-235: 12.1089). Based on this, an authentic Kurdish rug would hardly contain a dragon symbol. Most likely, the dragons in Kurdish carpets, “originated” as replicas of Turkic motifs. In the «Songur» carpet, the dragon motif is repeated many times, placed around the perimeter and serves as a protective border. The dragon motif is widespread in Caucasian and Afshar rugs since the Safavid era.

In the carpets, “Songur, there is another ornamental motif formed from the tamga. Straight horizontal line ending at the ends of ram horns. This is a “koch-tamga” (tamaga - sheep). Two Koch-tamgas are depicted both connected to each other and in a disconnected form. The image of this motif can be seen in the Anatolian carpets.

Thus, the design, color, and the entire decorative potential of the “Songur” carpet leave no doubt that it is a product of nomadic culture characteristic of Afshar and Shahsevens.

### **Conclusion:**

1. Analysis of the iconographic features of the design and motifs of the “Songur” carpet speaks of its close relationship with Afshar, Shahseven, Qashqai carpets and also with Shirvan and Anatolian carpets.

2. The name “Koliai carpet” in the mass media with the frequent prefix “Kurdish” or “Kurdi” has a speculative character and is an artificially “promoted” brand. More serious dealers and experts use a compromise name - “Songur-Koliai” carpet.

Speaking of geographic origin, the most objective name of this carpet can be considered “Songur carpet”. The district of Songur was the cultural environment in which the traditions of the Turkic and Kurdish rugs “mixed”. At the same time, the prevalence of the Turkic motifs in this design cannot be denied.

Authentic tribal carpets of nomads are incorrectly called a geographical term. Nomads say: «My homeland is where my flocks graze.» The most acceptable classification of this carpet can be considered tribal attribution - «Afshar carpet».

3. The name “Hamadan carpet” originated due to the trade movement of this carpet through Hamadan. Further promotion of this carpet through Zanzan, added to the existing names also “Zanzan carpet”.

4. The common name “Sirjan carpet” arose as a result of the “migration” of authentic “Songur” design into the Avshari-Kashkai environment of the southern Iranian province of Kerman. The authenticity of the archetype “Songur carpet” is best preserved in its “Sirjan variants”.

In numerous replicas of the “Songur” carpet, woven elsewhere, the nomadic archaism and simplicity of the carpet design are lost. Replicas of this carpet can be recognized by the excessive “elegance”, refinement of motifs and professional weaving and unjustifiably high density of knots.

### Epilogue

«Songur» carpet was the most loved in the collection of world-famous ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev. The grave monument of the famous artist in Paris is made in the form of a coffin covered with «Songur» carpet. Ethnic Turk (Tatar) Nureyev did not part with his beloved Afshar carpet and even after death.

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### ***Telman İbrahimov (Azərbaycan)***

#### **Afşar “Sonqur” (“Sonqor”) xalisinin mənşəyi barəsində**

Məqalədə özünəməxsus və tanınan dizayna malik Afşar “Sonqur” xalisinin mənşəyi, dizayn xüsusiyyətləri və dekorativ motivlərin semantikasi araşdırma predmeti qismində çıxış edir. Hal-hazırda şəxsi kolleksiyalarda, kütləvi İnformasiya vasitələri və xalı satışı üzrə xarici kompaniyaların xalı barəsində tərtib etdikləri təsvir mətnlərində “Sonqur” xalısı – kürd xalı sənəti kimi təqdim olunmaqdadır. Bununla belə, müxtəlif mənbələrdə “Kolyayi”, “Sircan”, “Həmədan”, “Zəncan”, “Sarab”, “Kalardaşt” və hətta – “Xotan” xalısı kimi təqdim olunması çaşqınlıq yaradır. Məqlədə bu məsələyə diqqət yetirilərək, xalının türk-Afşar mənşəli olması sübuta yetirilir.

**Açar sözlər:** Afşar, Sonqur, türk xalısı, köçəri, tayfa xalısı.

### ***Тельман Ибрагимов (Азербайджан)***

#### **О происхождении Афшарского ковра «Сонгур» («Сонгор»)**

В статье нашла отражение проблема этнической и культурной идентификации знаменитого ковра «Сонгур». Неповторимый и узнаваемый дизайн ковра «Сонгур» обозначен в мировых коллекциях, диллерских сайтах и интернет ресурсах под различными именами, указывающими на различные географическое происхождение. Дизайн ковра обозначен под различными названиями: «Колиаи», «Сонгур», «Сирджан», «Хамадан», «Занджан», «Нахаванд», «Сараб». Этот дизайн можно встретить



даже под названием «Хотан». Эти противоречивые названия одного и того же дизайна создают путаницу при классификации ковра.

Появление на рынке многочисленных реплик еще более осложняет ситуацию. Очевидно, назрела необходимость разобраться в аутентичности культурно-исторической среды, в которой он появился. Часто встречающиеся названия «Ковер Колиаи» с приставкой – курдский, имеют спекулятивный характер, не отражающий подлинное происхождение ковра.

**Ключевые слова:** Сонгур, Афшар, тюркский ковер, кочевники, племенной ковер.

